

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Estonia

DATE DISTR. 15 MAR 1954

SUBJECT Description of Sorve Peninsula on the Island of Saaremaa

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1. GENERAL

The Island of Saaremaa, also known as Osel, located off the western coast of Estonia, was formerly under the Estonian Republic and considered as the main portion of Saaremaa County. The other portion included the islands of Muhu, Aburka, and Ruhnu, as well as many smaller islands. The county as a whole was divided into 13 districts.

The southwest portion of the Island of Sorve is formed into a narrow peninsula or leg known as Sorve Leg to the islanders. The peninsula contains two districts, Ansékula and Jämaja. The district of Ansékula in the northern portion of the peninsula, containing an approximate area of 103 square kilometers also contains the narrowest portion of the neck of the peninsula measuring only 1.8 kilometers at the village of Üüdibe (or Udipää). At the village of Ansékula, the peninsula widens to 4.5 kilometers. A very low ridge of sand and gravel forms the spine of this narrow strip in the Ansékula district, along which runs the Kuressaare-Sorve road on the eastern coast. To the west, the ridge gradually levels off between the villages of Kaugatooma and Heaste into a limestone formation which forms a low wave cut terrace known as Kaugatooma Reef. This reef is approximately 20 feet above sea level. South from the village of Heaste, there is a very low beach extending down to Lou Gulf. This gulf is somewhat deeper and could accommodate ships of approximately 3,000 tons which have to, nevertheless, anchor approximately two miles from shore. Proceeding south from the Lou Gulf to the village of Kaunispeä, there is a low rocky reef. From thence south from the village of Jämaja there is again a shallow area extending approximately two miles seaward from the shore. The water in this area is approximately 20 to 30 feet deep. South from Jämaja to the village of Türju there are sand bars and rocky reefs extending approximately one and one half miles from shore and covered by approximately 8 to 10 feet of water. From Türju to the tip of the peninsula at Sääre, the coastline is low and the water approximately 20 to 30 feet deep.

At Sääre, there was a lighthouse used to warn of a rocky reef which extended eastward from Sääre approximately three miles. Proceeding from Sääre north along the eastern coast, there is a 30 foot deep harbor at Montu. Generally the water is deeper along the eastern coast and with the exception of the reef at the southern most portion, the eastern coast is clear.

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2. COMMUNICATIONS

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The main highway extends from the tip of the peninsula at Sorve along the eastern coast of the peninsula to the main body of the Island of Kuressaare. The road was constructed of sand and gravel laid on a rock bed. A short portion of this road located just outside of Kuressaare was made of cobblestone. The smaller roads located on the peninsula were all of sand and gravel construction but were in good condition in 1944. The last road that was built there to my knowledge was between the village of Tiisukula on the western coast to Kaimri on the eastern coast. This construction took place in 1936 or 1937. There are no railroads on the peninsula.

There was a small airfield located just north of Sääre. This airfield was approximately one and one half kilometers square and was built by the Soviets in 1940 or 1941. It had concrete runways; however, there were no buildings of any sort. This airfield was in good condition in 1941.

3. INDUSTRY

The main occupations on the peninsula were fishing and farming. The main crop was potatoes. There were many small dairies which produced milk products for export to the UK and Germany.

4. POPULATION

The total population of the peninsula in 1944 was approximately 6,000. The village of Ansekula had between 300 and 400 inhabitants, while the second largest village of Jämaja had approximately 300 inhabitants. Although there were rumors that the Soviets moved the population away from the area after 1944, I know through a friend of mine that as late as 1951 his wife was still living in the village of Vintri.

5. CONSTRUCTION

The houses on the peninsula were almost entirely of log cabin construction finished inside with smooth boards. Roofs were usually of straw or kelp although there were some tin roofs. Each home had its own well and sewage system.

In 1940 the Soviets built five large blocks of brick barracks each two stories in height and measuring from 100 to 150 feet in length by 50 feet in width. These were located at Maantee. In addition, there were eight wooden barracks each 100 feet long by 40 feet wide, plus other houses.

When the Soviets were forced out of the peninsula in 1941 by the Germans, they destroyed all of the buildings. They attempted to destroy the coastal guns but were unable to do so. During the German occupation, no construction of any sort took place.

6. VEGETATION

There are several large areas of heavy forest on the peninsula. Otherwise the land is low and rolling with soil of a sand and gravel mixture covered with hay fields. The arable land is spread out in patches around which small villages are located. Most of the forests are of pine trees.

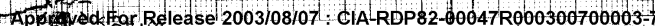
25X1 /Available on loan at the CIA Map Library is a hand-drawn map of the Sorve Peninsula on the Island of Saaremaa. This map is drawn from a 1931 published map of Estonia and has some additional annotations. To borrow map -

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SUBJECT & AREA

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